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ABSTRACT

Designed to be used before and after attending a performance of "Walking the Winds" (an original musical which dramatizes stories from a variety of ethnic American cultures using local young people as actors), this cue sheet presents information about the performance and suggests activities that can be done with classmates, friends, or family members. After noting that "Walking the Winds" is a story theater performance of flight, journeys, escape, and obstacles encountered and overcome, the cue sheet discusses (and suggests activities related to) props, dialogue, characters, scenery, costumes, pantomime, and audience participation. The cue sheet also discusses what makes a story worth telling or performing, and presents brief descriptions of the seven folktales that make up "Walking the Winds." (RS)

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CUE SHEET FOR STUDENTS

ED 381 840

WALKING THE WINDS: AMERICAN TALES

THE KENNEDY CENTER TRAVELING YOUNG PLAYERS

Each year the Kennedy Center auditions about 200 local young people to cast approximately 15 in an original musical. The performers attend theatre classes in February, and begin rehearsals after school and on Saturdays in March. They perform at the Kennedy Center and throughout the Washington metropolitan area in April.

WALKING THE WINDS is a story theatre presentation of flight, journeys, escape, and obstacles encountered and overcome. It dramatizes stories from a variety of ethnic American cultures.

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The Kennedy Center

What is Story Theatre?

Story Theatre is a style of performance that usually features the presentation of several stories. The show is performed by a troupe or company of actors, each of whom takes on several different roles. This form of theatre sometimes requires high-energy, exaggerated performances. It may incorporate music, including sound effects or songs sung by performers.

There are a number of techniques, or conventions, used in Story Theatre. You may recognize some of them during the performance. Afterward, use this checklist to see how many you noticed.

Props There are usually just a few simple ones. The same props may be used in different ways in more than one story.

Try playing the theatre game "Object Transformation." Use a scarf. How many ways can you hold and handle the scarf so that it represents different objects? (Some ideas: a baby, a pizza, a flower, a heavy iron pipe.)

Dialogue Lines may be assigned to individual speakers, pairs, small groups, or the entire cast. Characters may narrate their actions as well as speak their dialogue: for example, the performer playing Goldilocks might have this line: "Then Goldilocks tasted the porridge in the biggest bowl. This is too hot!"

Characters One actor may play multiple roles. Females may play male characters, and males may play females. Performers may play animals.

Scenery Most scenery is simple: wooden boxes, chairs, benches, tables, or ladders. These pieces may be rearranged quickly to indicate a number of settings. This makes set and scenery easily transportable.

Rearrange some chairs and a table to make: *a train, a cave, a mountain, a boat, a horse, a bridge, a stagecoach.*

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Costumes

The costumes are generally neutral in color and style. A few pieces may be added for a change of character, such as a hat, a cape, a coat, an apron, a wig, nose and glasses, gloves, a shawl, a vest, a bandanna, a crown, a fur coat... Costume pieces and props are often hung on the set pieces in full view of the audience, or kept in a large trunk. Performers may make their costume "changes" on stage. Costume pieces, like props and scenery, may be used in different ways in different scenes.

Think of costume pieces that could suggest: a bird, a rattlesnake, a turtle, a ghost, a tiger, an elf, a thief, a princess, a mermaid, a witch.

Pantomime

Performers use pantomime, even when the pantomimed object is visible. For example, one performer may pantomime cracking a whip while another, off to the side, actually cracks a real whip to produce the sound effect.

Pantomime these actions while a friend makes the sound effect: knock on a door, open a creaking gate, gallop away on a horse, gargle with mouthwash, play an instrument, pop a paper bag, bat a baseball, walk against a strong wind.

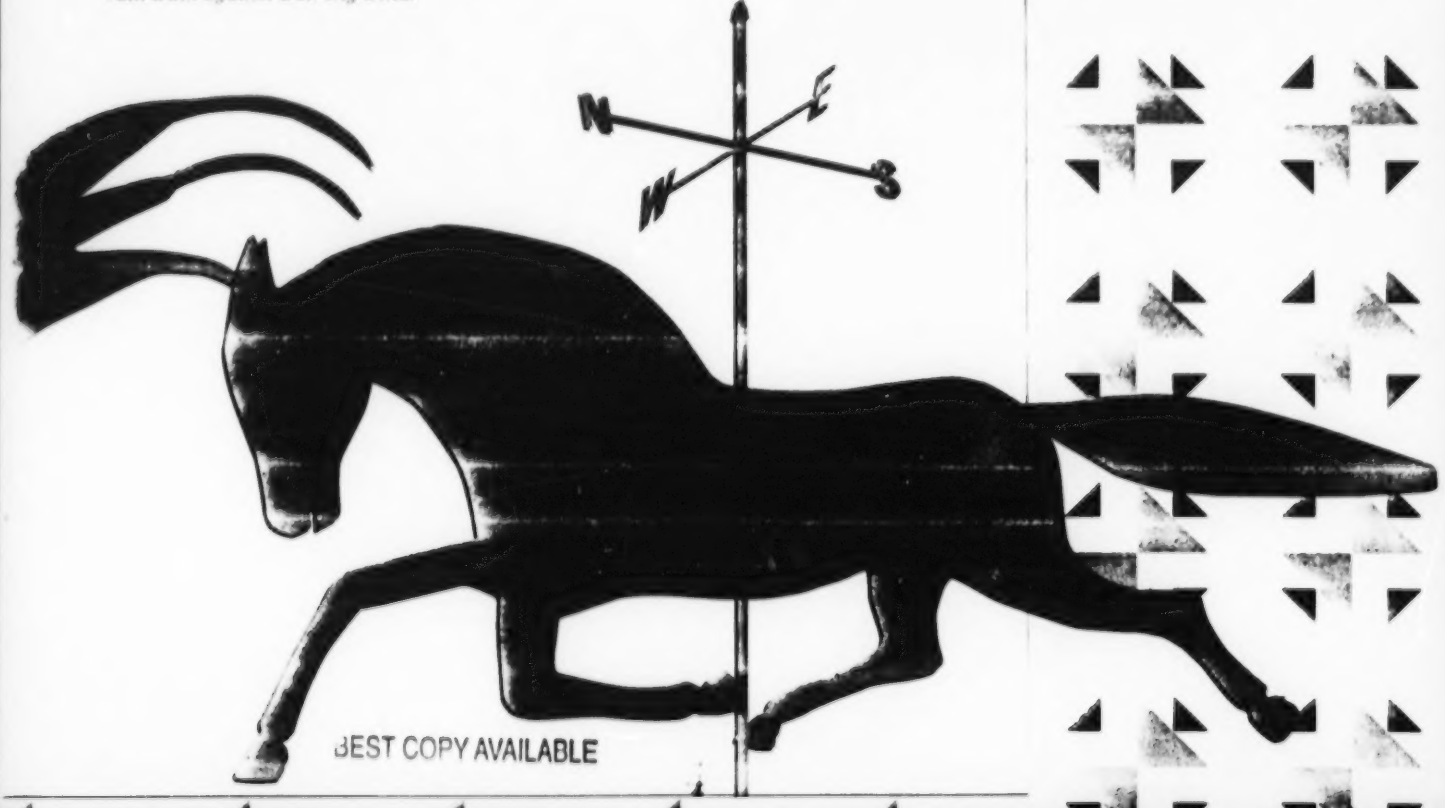
Sound Effects

The cast produces sound effects in full view of the audience, using their mouths or hands, or instruments like drums, whistles, tambourines, and kazoos.

How might you produce these sounds? *Cows mooing, thunder, lightning, rain, wind, night sounds, crickets, creaking doors, a horse's whinny and clopping hooves, ocean waves, seagulls.*

How can audiences help performers?

Story Theatre is a kind of entertainment that asks you to use your imagination. Work with the performers to pretend by picturing the stories they act out for you. You are all in the same room — unlike performers on television or in the movies — so help the actors by watching and listening carefully. Inappropriate talking can break their concentration and disturb other audience members. Enjoy yourself. Laugh. Applaud. Join in a story when invited to do so. Do your part as an audience member so that Story Theatre works for everyone.



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What makes a story worth telling or performing?

Story Theatre material is generally drawn from folk and fairy tales, legends, myths, and familiar literature. The stories in *Walking the Winds* are primarily folktales. Folktales are stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. Most have no known author, and there are often many variations of the same story. They are told to amuse and to educate. From them, people learn about the ideas, customs, beliefs, hardships, wishes, and dreams of a culture. Some are meant to explain natural phenomena. Because most folktales are simple and full of action, they work well on the stage.

What stories are dramatized in this production?

This original musical, written by three playwrights and one composer, features six tales from folklore traditions that underscore themes of generosity, good fellowship, overcoming obstacles, and achieving desired goals. The music for each tale is reflective of the culture from which it comes.

"How the Land Came To Be" In this creation myth water creatures decide to save the young wife of the ancient chief of the Sky-World and in return she gives them seeds that create the earth.

"Pecos Bill" A series of tall tales of a cowboy from the American west.

"Evangeline" This romantic legend of Evangeline, a young Acadian girl, and her loved one is based on the historical exodus of the Acadians who fled Canada in the late 18th century to escape religious persecution. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow created his poem from this legend.

"Br'er Tiger and the Big Wind" This trickster tale in the Gullah tradition teaches that companionship and sharing win out over greed and selfishness.

"The Iron Moonhunter" This ghost tale about the Chinese people who went to work for the Central Pacific Railroad talks about loyalty, friendship, and respect for those who died building the transcontinental railroad.

"It's the Pichilingis Again" In this comic folktale a family decides to leave home because the house is infested with pichilingis, the imaginary folk who play pranks. When they encounter the pichilingis wherever they go, they decide it is better to live with them at home.

"The People Could Fly" A classic African-American folktale in which a young man is inspired by the faith and belief of the griot who teaches him to fly.

Where could I find more of these stories?

Cohn, Amy L. (editor)
From Sea to Shining Sea: A Treasury of American Folklore and Folk Songs
New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc., 1993

Haviland, Virginia
North American Legends
New York, NY: Philomel, 1979

Campos, Anthony John
Mexican Folk Tales
Tucson, AZ: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1987

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